Language Plenty, Refugees & the post-Brexit world:- New Practices from Scotland.

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O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
An' ev'n devotion!

Robert Burns, To a Louse:

Introduction

On the day the BREXIT result was announced, June 24th 2016, the spokesperson for the Scottish National Party in Westminster, the MP Angus Robertson, appeared on the media in Europe, speaking fluent German. As resignations and disarray gripped the U.K Government, the leader of one of the Scottish National Party in Westminster was using one of the symbols of Europe – a foreign European language – to engage in politics with those the U.K. had just voted to leave. The use of German by Angus Robertson was both strongly pragmatic and political. It was an effective, symbolic way in which the Government of Scotland could make its 62% 'Remain' vote palpable in its communications with its European partners.

This was not exceptional. Other Members of the Scottish Parliament also regularly display their language skills with relative frequency. At the Opening of the Scottish Parliament in 2015, the MSP Humza Yousef, took his oath in Urdu. Gaelic, sign language, German, French, Norwegian feature, alongside regular use of Scots. Scots is not a language simply of the domestic sphere but in comfortable use across much of Scottish life. Rather as Te Reo is scattered with ease across the English of Aotearoa New Zealand in public discourse, so Scots is found in inflection and turns of phrase as well as Scots Language lexicon in everyday speech. Languages are present and used as strong symbols of an inclusive nationalism, by the ruling party in Holyrood, and, as I shall argue, increasingly so post-Brexit and in the

wake of the political crisis in Europe affecting refugees. This symbolic use means that they are seen, heard and experienced as part of the daily public and political discourse in Scotland.

Multilingual Scotland

Scotland has three 'home' languages, which are officially recognised as such by the Scottish Government: English. Gaelic and Scots. It is consequently, officially a multilingual country and has been since 2005. This marks a difference in Scotland in terms of the maturity of the multilingual policy debate across the U.K. It also connects, I would argue, to devolved policies of education, of linguistic inclusion, and to the indigenous language polices (Gaelic language Act of 2005) and the Sign Language (Scotland) 2015 Act. The latter requires sign language planning to be undertaken by public bodies and the development of an awareness raising strategy for sign language in Scotland. Furthermore, the policies of integration for refugees and asylum seekers have included ever greater focus on languages as essential to the provision of bonds and bridges for integration (Ager and Strang 2008). In addition, there has been a marked difference in leadership around the political discourse around the hosting of refugees to that offered by the U.K. parliament in 2016, which has included the development of language support for refugees.

Language Delivery and Educational Policies

Until very recently language policy making in Scotland continued to operationalise the model of delivery and the 'skills' discourse which connect the learning of language to general education policy, and to employability more specifically. Like the learning of modern foreign languages, the language learning for refugees has been entirely linked the use of human capital in the service of the labour market and productivity. Equally, the languages taught in School until revisions to A Curriculum for Excellence (the national curriculum for Scottish schools), remained the traditional European choices of French, German and Spanish or Italian, until the adoption in 2012 of the European 1+2 languages policy (Phipps and Fassetta 2015). In the explanation relating to language learning outcomes and experiences for parents of children in Scotland, Education Scotland offers this distinction:

> There are two parts to learning in languages. The first is about the language your child needs to be fully involved in their society and in learning (English, Gàidhlig). The second is learning additional languages.
>
> Your child will develop a secure understanding of how language works, and will use language to communicate ideas and information in English and other languages. They will develop their ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings and respond to those of others.
>
> (Languages in Curriculum for Excellence: https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/learning-in-scotland/curriculum-areas/Languages%20in%20Curriculum%20for%20Excellence)

The languages listed in the outcomes and experiences framework for modern languages are: French, German, Spanish, Italian, Gaelic (for learners), Urdu, Mandarin or Cantonese. Scots is also listed as a minority language, recognised officially as such by both the European Commission and the Scottish Government. With the Sign Language (2015) Act, Scotland, and consideration in the Scottish Parliament of the addition of Polish to the list of languages to be offered as part of modern language education in schools it's clear that multilingualism is developing apace in the varied, devolved policy contexts of Scotland.

Languages, Migration and Refugee Integration

The expansion of the multilingual space in Scotland is perhaps best exemplified by a comparison of refugee integration policies between Scotland and England and Wales.

The policies in Scotland already demonstrate multilingual, integrating thought, which is not yet present in the context in England and Wales. Scotland was one of the first jurisdictions worldwide to development an integration strategy for refugees (For example, it wasn't until January 2017 that the All Party Parliamentary Group for social integration began to make recommendations for an integration strategy for England and Wales which would include extension of English for Speakers of Other

Languages (ESOL) support and which recommended learning English overseas before the granting of a visa to allow someone to live and work in the U.K.

There is an important distinction to be made between integration and assimilation. When integration is understood as 'assimilation' there is a strong belief that new migrants will strive to become as much like the host communities as is possible, in language and cultural mores. In Scotland, however, the policies point to an understanding ointegration as a multilateral and ongoing social process with onus on all parties – host communities and 'New Scots' - to work towards the formation of new intercultural, multilingual communities .

However, language policy-making is at a relatively early stage in Scotland when it comes to thinking beyond a simple English language /ESOL/ EAL (English as an Additional Language) college delivery model. Since the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme was announced in 2015, and Scotland took a leading role in resettlement, local authorities and NGOs as well as the Refugees Welcome civil society movement have become involved in language learning activities. Languages are no longer an add-on to discussions about education or employment or health in Scotland, but rather there is active consideration of the place languages and multilingual realities might play in questions of integration.

It's a typical refugee integration forum gathering. The room is packed with great intentions and considerable experience of policy-making and policy-delivering. There are, thankfully, and after several earlier interventions in meetings, members of the group who are refugee-background themselves and therefore represent what is now termed 'experts by experience'. The meeting format is not conducive to such expertise, produced and choreographed as it is for middl- class civil servants and those with high levels of meeting-literacy. For the past two years I've served as a Commissioner with the Poverty Truth Commission and the experience has radically re-formed all my assumptions about how to make policy in a way which is inclusive, formulated under the Poverty Truth Commissions own borrowed slogan: 'Nothing about us without us is for us.'

We are listening – and its good we've got this far and are doing so directly – to Congolese refugees resettled years previously in the Greater Glasgow area. It doesn't make for happy listening and its clear that we need to do better. But the crunch comes, the one which will have us making new policies, when we are challenged directly and with the kind of words which come as poetry, cracking open a space in the density of policy talk.

"You are stingy with your languages; you do not speak to us in the street."

In the room there is a sharp intake of breath. "Genuine thinking is by nature poetic" says the philosopher Martin Heidegger, "it reveals the unconcealedness of being."

There has at some level been a breach and an important one.

Hospitality has been given and received and now we are receiving the gift in return, desired by Scotland's national Poet, Robert Burns: O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us! [oh the gift that God could give us, to see ourselves as others see us.]

Whilst these words created a discomfort there was also gratitude and, importantly, a recognition of the courage shown by a new Scot in naming with such frank openness and honest humour, his experience. The refugee was a native speaker of French, so in this meeting, in response to what he has told us, I broke the hegemony and expectation of a seamless discussion in English, by responding first in French and then in English.

In previous discussions of refugee policies at local government level in Scotland I had witnessed Scottish ministers carefully performing language integration through their leadership. Memorably when a refugee stood in a gathering to address the government minister responsible he did so through an interpreter. Before responding the minister in question paused and turned to his audience and to the interpreter directly explaining that he would now speak in shorter sentences in order to allow the interpreter to do her important work. It was a small thing, but it was a piece of policy being enacted, which enabled a moment for integration work to be experienced at the level

of the pace, tone, and care for the languages, and for language work to be undertaken in the room.

To get to a place where a minister can work multilingually in these ways does not come by accident. It requires ministers to be briefed by those who know how to interpret and translate, to gain an ease in multilingual settings, and, most significantly, not to be phased by being addressed in languages they do not understand. To create conditions from which a refugee-background resident of Scotland can shift the register and attitudes of civil society groups and NGO and public sector workers by a challenge to the 'stingyness with languages' is also only possible if a policy environment can sustain and embrace multilingualism, and has already begun this work in the past.

This, for me, is at the core of the policy initiatives developing, many in embryo, in Scotland at present and it stands in stark contrast to integration policies in England and Wales, and in much of the largely monolingual western world. In short, in Scotland there is an attempt to overcome the fear people have come to associate with other languages by enabling language contact and language learning which does indeed, and rightly, focus primarily on English, but goes beyond this into democratizing multilingual experience, language awareness and language access.

In England and Wales the policies have been marked by outsourcing and segregation, by cuts to ESOL provision and they have operated a monolingual model of integration. They stand in contrast to the multilingual policies being experimented with, in the multilingual jurisdiction of Scotland. Many of the policy and educational research initiatives are focused on 'mapping exercises' – who is offering what, in terms of language provision, to whom, where and when. Civil society groups like City of Sanctuary, or the Refugee Integration Networks, have all contributed to the activities of offering ESOL classes but also language learning events where the deficit model of language integration does not dominate. In other words, where the focus is not simply on migrants or refugees becoming functional in English, but allows others in the welcome movement and community to learn some new language words and phrases of Arabic or Tigrinya or Pashtu, for example. There is a discernible shift both with the languages offered by a Curriculum for Excellence, and with the refugee language cafes and clubs and gatherings in community

centres, museum basements, sports halls and even gardens towards a more inclusive linguistic landscape. This represents a break with the educational model which focused only on learning the languages of Europe and a shift into the wider global language learning of a world in conflict, a world of migration, and of a world which respects varieties of indigenous speech.

When observing many of the models being adopted there are two distinct approaches, which are to be noted for our purposes here. Firstly, much of the refugee language policy in Scotland is contained in the kinds of technocratic, learning outcomes discourse, which promises a linear flow towards the goal of fluency. It mirrors directly the kinds of discourse used in applied linguistics and language pedagogy research with models and levels and a sense of a linear flow towards ever greater heights on a language ladder, delivered with ever diminishing resources of time and contact in the classrooms. It is what forms the policy delivery bedrock for the funded ESOL and EAL classes and the communicative learning, which is also reflected in the language statement for parents for A Curriculum for Excellence, cited above.

Secondly, in the informal, community language classes, there is both an adoption and continuation by those trained in communicative language teaching but also now by volunteers, or those who have experienced language learning themselves, of the methods they have been schooled in already. This gives a wide teaching ecology from grammar –translation and audio-lingual models through to communicative approaches depending on age and experience of those facilitating and teaching. In addition, and where I find the greatest divergence from the dominant communicative or even intercultural language education models, is in the development of language learning through other activities – language in sewing classes, in shopping expeditions, in gardening or dance and theatre and arts classes. Languages are still predominantly being taught in classrooms, with a formal focus on language learning as the activity, but other activities are also being used as vehicles for language exchange and conversation and development.

Repeatedly, in the context of discussions relating to integration the question of languages surfaces. However, in the detail of the New Scots Integration Strategy [2014] reference to language was sparse and focused on ESOL classes and support for refugees learning

English. It did, nonetheless, recognise that refugees' language contributions, within the neoliberal frameworks of globalisation:

> Refugees have a range of skills, experience and resilience which can be utilised. Their language skills can inform Scotland's position in a globalised market and their potential for entrepreneurialism can be harnessed. (New Scots, p.38)

Between 2014 and 2017 a paradigmatic shift in understandings of languages can be traced through the policy documentation on refugee and migrant integration in Scotland which reflects the developments in multilingualism. As the final evaluation report on the New Scots Strategy 2014-2017 was published the central place of multilingualism for integration, was fully recognised as of mutual benefit under a heading: 'Recognising Scotland's Linguistic Diversity'. In the report mention is made repeatedly to the interpreting and translation of policy and practice guides, and other documents, into at least 11 languages, together with a strong focus on the importance of bilingualism, bilingual training, and a role for the language befriending activities of the pilot programme:

> The Scottish Government is funding Sharing Lives Sharing Languages, a peer education pilot, which aims to build connections between refugees and those whose first language is not English, and the host community, by developing a participative approach to language learning. (p.55)

A pilot policy was announced by the Scottish Government in 2016 to develop complementary language learning activities in communities. This grew out of a number of initiatives at NGO, Civil Society and Local Authority level as the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme was announced and Scotland volunteered to take a large share of the refugees. The funding model allowed for support of the new arrivals over the initial five years of their settlement and as many new organisations came to engage, statutorily with the newly arrived Syrians, the encounters with language needs on all sides was sufficient for the pilot to be proposed and implement. The proposal come from Education Scotland and from two academics – Alison Strang, who led the Integration strategy for Scotland and proposed a peer-education model, and myself. It was clear that the number of hours offered by structured ESOL classes needed firm complement

and that for good integrating practices to be forthcoming, a mutal effort at language engagement was needed, not least as a way of working with the 5:1 ration of volunteers to refugees in Scotland.

These new language befriending programmes were in no way seen as replacing structured classroom ESOL provision. It also recognised this as a key way in which the indigenous Scottish communities (many of whom are also New Scots and migrants themselves) volunteered support for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers, notably through language learning activities:-

> Syrian refugees will be encouraged to share their cultures and practise English with their new neighbours through a pilot scheme aimed at helping them settle into Scottish communities.
> Speaking at the Parliamentary Debate on Syrian Refugees, Equalities Secretary Angela Constance confirmed £85,000 funding for the new scheme which will build on the English language training all Syrian refugees have received.
> The pilot project, which will be trialled in four local authority areas, will bringing together refugees with members of their new communities, to practice their English and swap information about their different cultures.
> Volunteers help refugees learn more about local life by involving them in walking groups, coffee mornings, choirs or through sports activities.

This represents a shift in the multilingual landscape of Scotland's language education and integration strategy and it can be traced to the intervention by the refugee from DR Congo and his challenge to 'language stinginess' in Scotland. The pilot project is entering the evaluation phase (at time of writing – May 2017) and has been delivered, not by the language education specialists in the further education sector, but as a complement to their work, through the Scottish Refugee Council. The Scottish Refugee Council has acted as the main hub for the volunteer movement Scotland Welcomes Refugees, and has galvanised its volunteers into a great deal of language befriending activity, as this is now being described. This locates language befriending activities within the same frameworks of integration policy delivery in communities and international networks as well as in the arts-based approaches to integration, such as Refugee Festival Scotland – the 3 week long activities which focus on celebrating Scotland's refugee and host communities. These environments are a long way removed from the ESOL classes or the

Job Centre requirements fro English language learning, with the ever present threat of benefits sanctions. Already the safe-spacers outwith formal testing or threat is proving to be conducive to language practice.[http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/news_and_events/blogs/3062_sharing_lives_sharing_languages]

Language Plenty:

A key feature in the shifts which I have traced in this chapter is one which balances the dominant discourse of a language deficit model in learners, and speaks of 'barriers, competence, levels' to one which operates according to a pyscho-social, narrative paradigm. Telling and celebrating stories of language plenty, in contexts of befriending, which normalise multilingual relationships and bilingualism across Scotland are all part of this change. Frimberger (Frimberger 2016) has been one of the first to document this shift. In her work she has observed the way arts-based methods of language teaching can enable a movement into multiple relationships and expressive forms, which expand the space available for interpretive resources across society. In her descriptions of her practice-based research with young asylum and refugee learners she speaks of 'language plenty'. This concept allows for a reversal in the traditional language power dynamics by acknowledging the many languages spoken by refugees, versus the few which are often present in encounters with the indigenous population in Scotland. Those schooled in Scotland will often have access to at best one or two languages, whereas New Scots are often functionally multilingually in three or four languages.

In policy framings too, the discourse matters and if integration is to be real and meaningful and not simply assimulationist, in the ways described above, then the discourse of policy making has had to bend to the poetics of such a challenge. 'Language Pals; Language befriending; language plenty; sharing lives, sharing languages' all these phrases are relative newcomers in the language policy landscape and even in the research tropes in Applied Linguistics and foreign language pedagogy but they point to a dynamic shift towards multilingualism, and beyond even the language-learning which was developed from the Council of Europe. As the old certainties of multiculturalism, of European language policies of 1 plus, 2, and ofintercultural communicative competence, all begin to crack under the strain of what I and others now see as the end of peace-time

policy-making in the European context, it is in the poetics of such a challenge that we might begin to make policies which can serve all. The policies developed for European during over 60 years of relative peace are being tested by the arrivals of those fleeing conflict. The presence of speakers and learners who have not grown up in days when European peace was a given, brings new challenges to language policy making. Lessons need to be learned from those contexts world-wide which operate different models of multilingualism. And policy making itself needs new language. Terms such as 'integration and cohesion' are ones used with critical caution and wariness at present.

In Scotland, we find emergent language policies which are shifiting the discourses, even if we are all 'beginners' in the practices of 'language plenty', overcoming a certain language 'stinginess' and have only came to this realisation through the power '*the giftie gie us, to see oursels as ithers see us!*'

References

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